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## THE RESULTS OF HUMAN TRAFFICKING RIGHT BEFORE YOUR EYES: CHILDREN FORCED INTO PANHANDLING TO APPEAL TO TOURISTS

LODEMA M'POKO<sup>†</sup>

You've just completed a satisfying shopping trip at Sandton City Mall in Johannesburg, South Africa. After throwing your numerous bags in the car, you begin the trek back to your hotel. "What an amazing vacation this is," you think to yourself, as you approach a traffic light. However, your warm fuzzy feelings dissipate as a young woman, dressed in tattered and dirty clothing, stands tapping at your window at just the appropriate angle to display the small, peaked-looking child strapped to her back. She smiles, waves, and puts her hand to her mouth, signaling that she is hungry. Feeling guilty about all of the money you just spent shopping, your heartstrings are officially tugged. You reach into your bag, and hand her a crisp bill. She thanks you and moves on to the next car. Your fuzzy feelings return, since you made it possible for a mother and child to finance their next meal. You feel good about your deed. The question is, should you?

Probably not. It's likely that you've been scammed. Most people think child human trafficking is done for sexual purposes. However, using children to panhandle unsuspecting tourists is becoming increasingly popular. Panhandlers know that using children garners sympathy and can be very lucrative. So much so that children are often rented out, kidnapped, or lured away from their homes.

In South Africa, police investigated a crime syndicate that involved panhandlers renting babies and small children from crèches for about \$3 per day.<sup>1</sup> A crèche is a public daycare for the poor that cares for the children while the mothers are at work.<sup>2</sup> Children are also rented directly from the mothers. In these cases, older children's legs are sometimes broken so that the children appear smaller than what they are when tied to the 'mother's' back. Smaller children garner more sympathy. Children may also be drugged so that they appear sickly.<sup>3</sup> This practice can net up to nearly \$70 per day.<sup>4</sup>

Child trafficking for panhandling purposes is not limited to South Africa. It is increasingly popular in other third-world countries as well. For instance, in India, gangs are known to kidnap children from their homes, and force them into a life of

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<sup>1</sup> *South Africa Police Investigate 'Baby Begging Scam'*, BBC NEWS (Aug. 17, 2010, 9:47 ET), <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-10999224>.

<sup>2</sup> *Crèche Definition*, THEFREEDICTIONARY.COM, [www.thefreedictionary.com/creche](http://www.thefreedictionary.com/creche) (last visited Nov. 30, 2011).

<sup>3</sup> *Rent-A-Baby (Part 1)*, M-NET (May 23, 2010, 7:00), <http://beta.mnet.co.za/carte blanche/Article.aspx?id=3964>.

<sup>4</sup> *Id.*

panhandling. These children are starved and beaten for several days, and are then maimed or blinded to garner more sympathy.<sup>5</sup>

In Senegal, parents send their young boys to daraas, Quranic schools run by religious leaders to educate the boys in religion and academics.<sup>6</sup> However, these boys receive a rude awakening when they arrive. Instead of being taught and nurtured, they are forced onto the streets for long hours to beg for money.<sup>7</sup> These schools collect up to \$60,000 per year from the children. One would question why parents would be willing to send their children off to these schools if tragic results are inevitable, but in Muslim societies, such as Senegal, sending your children away to daraas is not out of the ordinary.

Knowing these facts puts the compassionate tourist in a tough position. He is left to decide whether or not he should give money to these poor, begging children. There is always the chance that the child's plight may be legitimate, and not forced on him by a con artist. As difficult as it may be, the answer is no.<sup>8</sup> To give to these children perpetuates the problem. The "bleeding" must be stopped at its source. If tourists continue to "feed" the child trafficking industry by donating to child beggars, kidnappers, scammers and con artists will continue to funnel these poor children into that life.

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<sup>5</sup> *Gangs Profit from Maimed Child Beggars*, THE CNN FREEDOM PROJECT: ENDING MODERN DAY SLAVERY BLOGSPOT (May 4, 2011, 12:07 AM), <http://thecnnfreedomproject.blogs.cnn.com/2011/05/04/gang-profits-from-maimed-child-beggars/>.

<sup>6</sup> *Senegal: Boys in Many Quranic Schools Suffer Severe Abuse*, HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH (Apr. 15, 2010), <http://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/15/senegal-boys-many-quranic-schools-suffer-severe-abuse>.

<sup>7</sup> *Id.*

<sup>8</sup> *See Begging Tools*, IOL NEWS (May 8, 2008, 12:43 PM), <http://www.iol.co.za/news/south-africa/begging-tools-1.399443>; *What Happens When You Give-A Case Study*, ONS PLEK PROJECTS, <http://www.onsplek.org.za/index.php?id=88> (lasted visited Nov. 30, 2011).